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MORAL CHARACTER AND CONDUCT:

AN ONTOLOGICAL-CONFRONTATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract*: The article examines character formation and moral conduct from an ontological-confrontational perspective, proposing that humans are dynamic beings engaged in deep internal struggles rather than mere products of genetics or culture. It introduces the concept of the Personal Ontos – an internal pluristructured space where autonomous entities called onto-formations (biological, emotional, rational, spiritual) compete and conflict to influence moral decisions. These onto-formations are autonomous "beings" with their own self-governance, needs for affirmation, preservation, and dominance, turning the inner self into a complex battlefield. Moral development emerges from the ongoing confrontation between these inner forces, shaping who we are and the principles we choose. Ethical exemplars like Socrates and Mandela represent victories in this internal struggle, revealing morality as a continuous process of becoming rather than fixed rules. In today's world of moral relativism and shifting values, the article calls for conscious interior discernment and self-ordering. Moral action arises not from external pressure but from the synthesis of inner conflicts guided by reason and spirituality. This framework deepens our understanding of character, viewing tension and conflict as essential to authentic morality and urging personal responsibility in shaping one's inner life daily.*

Keywords: *Ontological confrontation, character formation, moral conduct, Personal Ontos, onto-formations, inner conflict, moral development, ethical exemplars, self-ordering, authentic morality*

Introduction: Moral Character and Conduct Between Internal, External, Interactional, and … an Ontological-Confrontational Perspective

The perennial questions surrounding the origins of character and the foundations of moral conduct have long been central to philosophical and scientific inquiry. What drives a person toward good or evil? How do we explain the moral strength of individuals who, despite adverse conditions, choose integrity and courage? How can we understand the ethical complexity of figures like Socrates, Gandhi, Mandela, or Mother Teresa? Are such lives shaped primarily by environment, inner nature, or existential struggle?

Historically, two main perspectives have sought to explain the formation of character: the endogenous view, which emphasizes internal determinants – biological, psychological, or metaphysical – and the exogenous view, which highlights external factors such as culture, education, and social structures.The endogenous perspective, often rooted in essentialist or theological views, sees character as predetermined by heredity, temperament, or divine will, and tends to reduce moral freedom. In its modern form, this view is echoed in genetic and neuroscientific theories that attribute conduct to biological predispositions. The exogenous perspective, prominent in modern thought, presents the individual as shaped primarily by context – norms, education, language, and values – viewing human beings as malleable and highly influenceable. While both offer valuable insights, each is limited when taken alone. The endogenous view neglects the potential for conscious transformation, while the exogenous view overlooks the inner life. Neither adequately explains the moral resolve of those who act ethically despite hostile environments.

A more recent interactional perspective proposes that character arises from the dynamic interplay between inner structures and external influences. Here, character is not simply inherited or taught, but formed at the intersection of biology and experience. Yet this perspective, though more balanced, still falls short if it ignores the deep ontological and confrontational dimension of moral development.

This article proposes an ontological-confrontational perspective, introducing the concept of the Personal Ontos. It views character and

moral conduct as the outcome of an internal struggle for meaning, coherence, and ethical choice within the ontological space of the human being. The Personal Ontos refers to the entirety of a person's inner existence – not static, but evolving through confrontation, choice, and responsibility. Unlike the interactional model, which emphasizes mutual influence between self and environment, this approach sees inner conflict as the engine of moral becoming.

Character formation unfolds in stages. Initially, it involves tension between the self and the outside world, leading to the formation of internal structures called onto-formations. Later, the main conflict occurs within the Personal Ontos, as these onto-formations interact. In real-life situations, moral conduct reflects a dynamic clash between endemic onto-formations (rooted in one's biological and early psychic structure) and internalized onto-formations (cultural norms, values, and beliefs).

A key ontological claim here is that these onto-formations are not passive psychological contents, but semi-autonomous structures – each with its own tendencies, persistence, and expressive force. In certain contexts, one may dominate behavior. Thus, characteris not a fixed set of traits but a living synthesis of internal confrontations within the Personal Ontos. This framework offers a richer understanding of exemplary moral figures who cannot be explained solely by genes or context. To grasp such moral complexity, we must move beyond the nature–culture dichotomy and adopt the ontological-confrontational lens – a necessary evolution of the interactional view that places the Personal Ontos at the heart of moral authenticity and becoming.

Personal Ontos as the Internal Ontological Ground of Moral Character and Conduct

The Ontological-Confrontational Perspective I propose here naturally brings into focus ontology, existentialism, and the theory of being, offering a vision of the person that goes beyond the simplistic status of a passive product of social influences or neural programming. Instead, the human being is understood as the result of a dynamic development, marked by internal biopsychological and ontological conflicts and competing forces. This inner architecture – constantly forming,

reforming, and evolving in correlation with existence – I call the Personal Ontos: a mega onto-formation, the global inner being of the person, composed of multiple subordinate or transversal "beings," each with a high degree of autonomy and self-determination. These constituent structures, which I also refer to as ontos, represent distinct onto-formations. The term ontos, of course, is derived from the Greek ontos, meaning “being” or “that which is.”

Whereas scientific biopsychology tends to portray the person as a predictable mechanism – a large, coherent and functional organism, whose parts operate through precise interconnection – the ontological-confrontational approach introduces a dynamic theory of being. It describes the human person as a constellation of multiple self-governing entities, onto-personal components, which, by their nature, function, role, or determining factors, are not necessarily in alignment but often in ongoing, constitutional ontological opposition, or even internal conflict. And yet, the Personal Ontos, as a whole, encompasses them all: it is the complex sphere within which these subordinate onto-formations emerge, act, and confront one another.

Neither the Personal Ontos as a whole nor its individual onto-formations are predetermined. They are actively constructed over the course of life, developing ontogenetically – that is, through a complex, sinuous, conflict-laden, and continuous process of becoming that spans one’s entire existence. We are not born with them; they are forged and refined continuously, in and through lived experience – through sensation, emotion, thought, action, behavior, and interaction – even when external conditions seem to dictate our every step.

These onto-formations possess a significant degree of autonomy, yet they interact in competitive and often confrontational ways. Through their ongoing struggle, they shape both the Personal Ontos and the resulting expressions of moral character and conduct in a fluid and circumstantial manner.

Constituent Onto-Formations as Autonomous Beings and Their Moral Valence

At the foundation of human existence lies the Biological Ontos, the physical and hereditary base of being. It includes physico-chemical aspects, genetic traits, temperament, physiological needs, and survival

instincts. Though often excluded from moral discourse, this ontos sets the limits and conditions for our actions. A choleric temperament, for instance, may predispose to impulsivity, showing how biology influences behavior. Governed by nature's laws and shaped by health and heredity, it may appear disconnected from ethics but often clashes with moral imperatives. Despite this tension, it is essential for the emergence of the Emotional Ontos.

The Emotional/Affective Ontos encompasses the spectrum of emotions – from joy and love to anger and sorrow. Emotions can inspire or distort judgment. Feelings like empathy, guilt, and shame are crucial in shaping moral behavior. However, moral character is not dictated by emotion alone but arises from its synthesis with reason and deeper values. This ontos develops through early attachment, social interaction, and emotional learning. It evolves from primal responses to nuanced affective states, capable of both volatility and deep, lasting sentiments. Though often contrasted with the rational domain, it plays a key role in moral motivation.

The Noetic/Cognitive Ontos involves thought, understanding, memory, and creativity. It is the seat of moral reasoning – the ability to discern right from wrong and anticipate consequences. Without it, morality remains superficial. This ontos develops through education and reflection, shifting from concrete to abstract thought. Though rooted in rationality, it is shaped by biases and information context. A philosopher may cultivate a rich noetic life, yet its moral expression still depends on inner harmony with the other onto-formations – showing that reason alone is insufficient.

The Spiritual Ontos grants depth and transcendence to human life. It guides the search for meaning, higher values, and connection with something beyond the self. Not limited to religion, it reflects the human capacity for self-transcendence and existential awareness. It shapes moral ideals and provides ethical direction. Formed through spiritual experiences, existential questioning, and engagement with philosophical traditions, it becomes most active in crises and moments of deep reflection.

The Projective-Volitional Ontos governs choice, intention, and purposeful action. It enables goal-setting, persistence, and responsible conduct. Shaped through challenges, decisions, and self-discipline, it matures from impulsivity to autonomy and perseverance. This ontos translates moral principles into action – it is the force that enacts ethical will in the world.

These onto-formations – as dimensions of the Personal Ontos – are more than parts; they are beings in the ontological sense: autonomous,

self-regulating, in constant becoming. Following Aristotle, each being has its own path toward actualization. Heidegger's Dasein opened the way for understanding being as self-aware, but we can go further: each ontos, biological or symbolic, is a center of internal order, a system with its own rhythm and logic.

In psychology, this is echoed by theories like self-determination (Deci&Ryan), where autonomy defines true existence, or by Maslow and Rogers' concept of self-actualization. These inner processes seek coherence and meaning, not stasis. Homeostasis becomes not just biological balance but a philosophical tension – between order and change, self and world. Each ontos seeks a dynamic equilibrium, fueled by experience and purpose.

To call these dimensions "beings" is to reject the simplistic hierarchy of body below and mind above. Instead, we recognize a plurality of centers, each with its own law and energy. Every ontos is not a fragment, but a living flame – self-sustaining, inwardly and outwardly nourished, shaping the orchestration of the Personal Ontos.

This orchestration is less a structure and more a battlefield, where moral identity is continuously negotiated – between instincts and ideals, impulses and insights. It is in this living tension that moral character and conduct are forged.

How Moral Character Emerges: A Result of Ontogenetic-Structural Confrontations Between Subject and Environment, and Between Onto-formations as Beings

In the confrontational-ontological perspective we develop here, moral character is not a predetermined given, a genetic programming, or a passive outcome of socialization. Rather, it is the result of a complex and tension-filled confrontation occurring on two levels: between the subject and the environment (along the ontogenetic trajectory), and within the being itself – between the autonomous onto-formations of the personal ontos: biological, emotional, noetic, spiritual, and projective-volitional.

These are regarded not merely as dimensions, but as autonomous beings with their own tendencies, interests, and strategies. Character, in this light, is the enduring yet dynamic imprint of how this multilayered confrontation is integrated over time – through a process of balancing, hierarchizing, and directing internal forces. Each individual thus becomes, in this view, an ontological battlefield, where biological,

emotional, rational, spiritual, and volitional "factions" contend for control over moral decision-making and personal identity. On this inner battlefield, the Personal Ontos is not a passive receptacle but the terrain and the very stake of the confrontation. It becomes the stage upon which each onto-formation pursues its hegemony: the biological fights for survival and comfort; the emotional for affective security and recognition; the noetic for logical coherence and reason; the spiritual for meaning and transcendence; and the volitional for self-determination and direction.

Moral character is shaped through the long-term management of these internal struggles. When reason and spirit (the Noetic and Spiritual Ontos), supported by a strong will (the Projective-Volitional Ontos), succeed in organizing and harmonizing the lower dimensions (biological and emotional), a coherent, resilient, and integral character emerges. Conversely, when biological or emotional impulses gain disproportionate dominance, the result is a weak, fragmented, or even vicious character. Thus, character is not merely a psychological trait but an ontological and ontogenetic construction – forged through struggle, effort, repeated decisions of self-transcendence, and an ongoing dialogue with both the environment and the deep self. In this sense, character is the architecture, established over time, of our moral victories and failures.

The Moral Behavior as a Result of Structural and Circumstantial Confrontations Among Onto-formations as Autonomous Beings

If character is the internal moral structure stabilized over time, then moral behavior is its immediate, visible expression – reflecting the momentary state of balance (or imbalance) between conflicting forces within the Personal Ontos. Behavior is therefore not a mere external reaction, but rather the living reflection of inner struggles unfolding at every moment of existence.

Every moral action – whether generous, courageous, empathetic, or conversely selfish, cowardly, or destructive – is the result of a confrontation, sometimes instantaneous, among internal factions. For instance, an altruistic gesture may arise when the Emotional Ontos (empathy), supported by the Spiritual Ontos (transcendent values), overcomes the selfish impulses dictated by the Biological Ontos (self-preservation) or the lower Emotional Ontos (fear).

In this view, moral behavior is always contextual, shaped by external circumstances (which activate certain factions), and by the current state of the internal hierarchy among the onto-formations. A person with a strong character will generally maintain stable moral conduct – but even this can fluctuate in extreme situations, where certain inner forces become overwhelming. A lack of coherence in conduct reveals either a fragile character or a destabilized Personal Ontos, where one faction – biological or emotional, for example – has temporarily seized control. On the other hand, moral coherence – the rare ability to act according to one's principles even in critical moments – reflects an inner order won through struggle. Thus, moral conduct is not merely a learned reflex, but an act of momentary victory – of spirit, reason, and will over lower tendencies and external pressures. It is living proof that the human being, even in the face of chaos or suffering, can affirm their moral freedom.

Looking at these profound dynamics between subject and environment, and among the inner forces of the self, we come to see that the formation of character and moral conduct are achievements, not guarantees. Yet it is precisely from this tension that the greatest victories of the human spirit are born. There are individuals who, through a sustained effort of inner harmonization and ethical assertion, succeed not only in withstanding inner conflict, but in transforming that battleground into a space of moral light.

These are the great moral personalities of humanity – individuals in whom Spirit and Reason have triumphed in a lasting way, generating not only inner order, but also a profound ethical influence upon the world.

Great Moral Personalities: The Victory of Spirit and Reason

The Personal Ontos is not a linear or passive structure, but rather an inner battlefield – a territory marked by latent tensions and active confrontations among multiple onto-formations that coexist, oppose one another, negotiate, or temporarily form alliances. We do not live as homogeneous units, but as tense entities, where what we call the "self" is in fact the ever-provisional outcome of these intimate inner confrontations.

In the depths of our being, the biological onto-formation – with its imperatives of survival, pleasure, comfort, and self-preservation – often comes into conflict with the spiritual onto-formation, which demands

sacrifice, transcendence, and self-renunciation. Between them pulses the emotional onto-formation, volatile and unstable, producing fear, anger, attachment, or despair, oscillating frequently between the two dominant poles. Reason – that is, the noetic onto-formation – tries to act as a lucid mediator, seeking order, meaning, and discernment, but is often caught in conflicting loyalties. At the center of this field, the projective-volitional onto-formation – responsible for intention, decision, and action – is the front line: it must choose, direct, and ultimately determine which force will take command.

Socrates, standing before a city that demanded he save his life by silencing himself, felt this battle with an almost unimaginable intensity. The biological onto-formation spoke clearly: choose life. Emotionally, the fear of death, the longing to remain with loved ones, the desire to keep learning and speaking – all were real. Yet the alliance between his penetrating reason and the sacred sense of spiritual vocation – his inner daimon – prevailed. The will executed the command of these higher forces, and the body followed the path they had determined. He died – but in that death, he achieved an absolute victory over ontological disorder.

In Gandhi, the inner battle was longer, more painful, and perhaps more visible. The emotional onto-formation boiled at the sight of humiliation, violence, and injustice. Biologically, he was fragile: a frail body subjected to self-imposed hunger, pain, and exhaustion. But in him, the spiritual onto-formation, nourished by the conviction that Truth (Satya) is divine and that Love (Ahimsa) is stronger than the sword, established a quiet yet unbreakable hegemony. Reason worked tirelessly, crafting nonviolent strategies, organizing communities, while his will – almost inhuman in strength – imposed a fixed course: freedom through non-retaliation. It was a daily battle, a constant reaffirmation of the authority of the higher onto-formations over organic and passionate temptations.

Nelson Mandela lived for decades at the epicenter of a merciless ontological confrontation. In prison, the biological onto-formation struggled under the weight of hunger, isolation, and illness. Emotionally, there was every reason to surrender to hatred, revenge, and the urge to destroy the other. Yet Mandela refused to yield his will to that dark alliance. Instead, the noetic onto-formation, kept alive through study and reflection, worked together with the spiritual dimension of an ideal of reconciliation. He did not walk out of prison to become free – he was already free within it. When he emerged, the victory was not political, but

ontological: the lower onto-formations had already been integrated into a self no longer enslaved by hate.

In Mother Teresa, the battle was one of daily endurance. Her biological onto-formation was often exhausted, fragile, plagued by illness. Emotionally, the risk of cynicism or desensitization in the face of unending misery was always present. Yet within her, the spiritual onto-formation – sustained by a simple but unshakable faith – and the noetic onto-formation – pragmatic and organizing – formed a solid command structure. The will was trained to carry out the mission, regardless of cost. Each day, with every contact with the dying and the abandoned, the battle resumed – and was won. The victory was not of the body, nor of emotion: it was the triumph of an inner order, self-imposed.

Such individuals were not free of conflict. On the contrary, they rose through it. In them, the Personal Ontos became a theatre of inner war where higher forces were not only acknowledged but embraced, trained, and elevated to sovereignty. This is true morality: not merely a set of rules or principles, but the outcome of a war won within. In a world governed by ontological chaos and centrifugal impulses, such victories are not only rare – they are absolutely essential.

Some Concluding Considerations

In light of the reflections developed throughout this article, a disturbing yet lucid intuition emerges: in our contemporary condition – marked by normative ambiguity, axiological disorientation, and the collapse of common moral landmarks – it is no longer sufficient to lean on inherited traditions, external codes, or symbolic authorities. The world no longer speaks with a single moral voice. Religion, science, ideology, and culture all offer partial answers, fragments of meaning – but none can fully ground an absolute moral certainty. What happens to the human being when the collective no longer offers a compass? Where can one orient themselves when every coordinate is trembling?

We are thus projected into a landscape in which moral responsibility can no longer be delegated, but becomes a radical interior task. It is not enough to follow; one must choose, discern, construct. But in whose name? Based on what inner authority? What can justify, in the absence of a fixed norm, an authentic moral life? This is the paradox – and the burden – of modern freedom: the human being must become the architect of their own moral being, not from pride, but from ontological necessity.

In such a disoriented universe, goodness no longer arises from mere conformity, nor from obedience or social reward. It emerges from the capacity to govern one's own inner order and disorder – to confront, understand, and balance the forces that inhabit the human interior. As argued earlier, the personal Ontos is not a unified self, but a conflicted inner ecology, populated by autonomous onto-formations – biological, emotional, rational, volitional, and spiritual – that coexist, collaborate, sabotage one another, and fight for supremacy.

Are we truly individuals? Or merely tensioned fields of opposing inner forces? Are our choices truly free? Or merely temporary reflections of whichever onto-formation holds sway at a given moment? These are not rhetorical questions – they cut into the very essence of the moral condition. What we call character is not a stable substance, but the ever-precarious outcome of an inner war. And what we call virtue is not a given – it is a temporary, often fragile victory over impulse, fear, and disorder.

To live morally, then, no longer means simply "to be good," but to maintain a lucid inner order – so that the Noetic Ontos (critical reason) and the Spiritual Ontos (the sense of higher values and transcendent meaning) can moderate and restrain the Biological and Emotional Ontos. But can this balance ever truly be achieved? Or are we condemned to a perpetual war within?

This struggle – silent, yet decisive – is not an accident of human nature, but the profound expression of ontological freedom. We are not what we are – we become what we choose to be, moment by moment, act by act, through every affirmation or renunciation. Morality is not peace – it is conquered order. Not serenity, but a disciplined victory over inner fragmentation.

Hence, the great figures of moral verticality – Socrates, Gandhi, Mandela, Mother Teresa – were not simply ethical role models. They were victors of the inner war. They did not live without conflict – they forged their being through conflict consciously assumed and spiritually directed. They were not "good" by nature or historical accident, but by the relentless effort to bring their lower forces into obedience to clear, transcendent command. Through them, we see that goodness is not a state, but a continuous act of choosing, sometimes step by step, sometimes on one's knees.

Therefore, ethics can no longer be understood as mere conformity or adherence to an immutable code. It becomes a process of becoming, carried out in the heart of a brutal inner battlefield where the fate of human meaning is decided. And yet, we are left with questions –

unanswered, perhaps unanswerable, but essential if we are to live morally awake:

- What, truly, is goodness? Is it a transcendent voice, an echo within, or a fragile construction of reason?
- What is evil – an absence of inner order, a domination by impulse, or a deliberate turning away from the higher self?
- How can I know which inner voice speaks with truth? How do I distinguish fear from wisdom, desire from vocation?
- What must I train in myself to avoid becoming a slave to circumstance or chaos?
- What kind of effort does true moral freedom demand?
- And most painfully – how do I regulate my inner being so that I may walk not in certainty, but in truth?

Perhaps there is no final answer. But perhaps it is precisely this search, this fierce inner struggle, that marks the very beginning of goodness. Perhaps authentic morality does not begin with certainty, but with the question. And perhaps the true measure of a human being – of their character and moral conduct – is not found in what they do when everything is clear, but in what they choose to become and to do when nothing is certain.

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